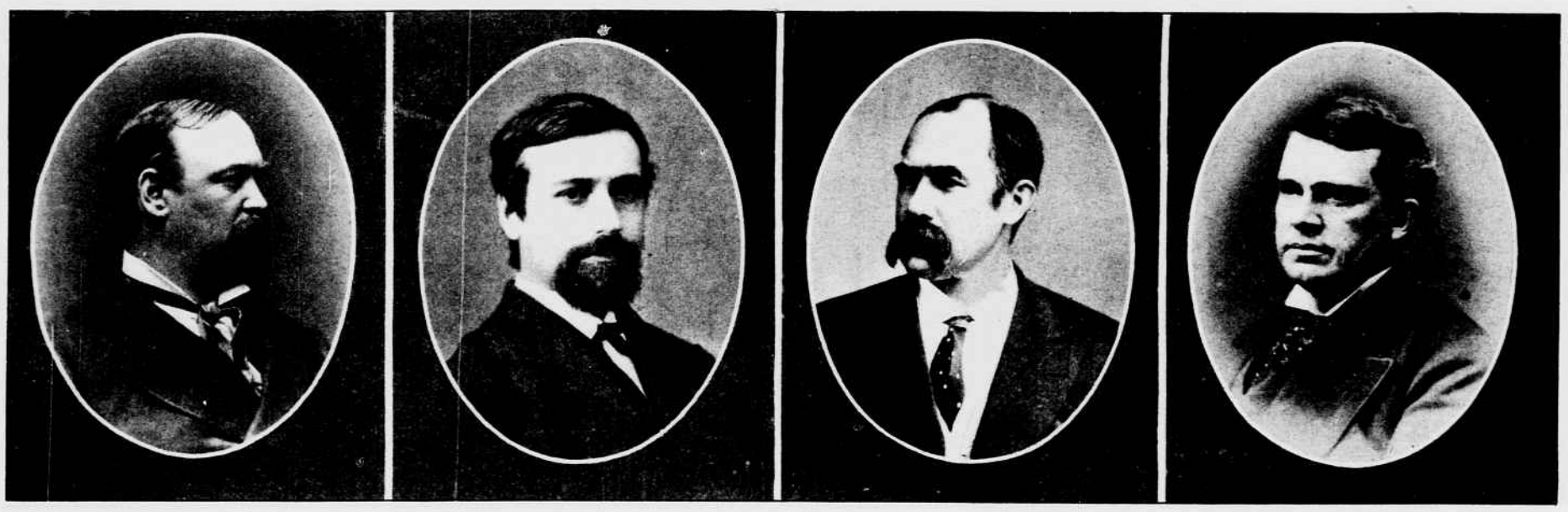
The Evening Star Company in 1867.



Mr. G. W. Adams. Mr. C. S. Noyes. Mr. S. H. Kauffmann. Mr. A. R. Shepherd.

WASHINGTON JOURNALISM, PAST AND PRESENT.

BY CROSBY S. NOYES.

In the latter part of December, 1847, I, a sickly youngster, left my home in Maine for Washington in quest of a milder climate. Partly for exercise and partly for economy's sake I walked a good part of the way from Philadelphia to Washington. On the last day of that month I had walked from Baltimore as far as Beltsville, when I was overtaken about sundown by a jolly old fellow who was driving into Washington with a load of produce for the Washington market. I very promptly accepted his invitation to ride in with him to the city, but afterward concluded that I had better walked. For it soon appeared that he only wanted to get to Washington in season to place his wagon in a good position for the market next morning. He stopped at every grogshop on the road, and there were a good many of them at that time on the old, much-traveled Baltimore and Washington turnpike. He not only took many drinks himself, but insisted that I should drink with him. In those days it was a mortal offense to refuse to drink when invited, and the whisky sold at those places was vile stuff, but as he grew more stupid and less vigilant I managed to empty my glass into the spittoon as often as it was replenished. The weather had meantime turned very cold. I had no overcoat and altogether my night ride into Washington was a pretty dismal affair. It was nearly midnight when we reached the city, and just as we came to the Center market, then called the Marsh market, the bells were ringing the old year out and the new year in.

The market house then was a set of tumble-down sheds, moss covered, doorless and the lodging place for tramps and vagrants of all sorts. Back of it was the filthy old canal, the city cesspool, the receptacle for all the offal of the city.

I lodged for the night at one of the small taverns on 7th street, opposite the market, called then "Cattail Row." In the morning I paid a "levy" for my lodging and a "fip" for a cup of coffee and some doughnuts at the market house. In those days the old Spanish silver currency was in use, and the small coins were the "levy," worth 12½ cents, and the "fip," 6¼ cents. When the coins were worn beyond recognition they were scratched with a cross and then passed only for 10 cents or 5 cents, respectively. After my light breakfast I started out to see Washington, heading first for the Capitol, as most visitors do.

On my way to the Capitol, attracted by a sign, I stopped and engaged board at the boarding house of Michael McDermott, southwest corner of 3d street and Pennsylvania avenue, where Mades' Hotel now is. Mr. McDermott had a large coach factory and warehouse on his premises, running through to Missouri avenue. I paid $2.50 per week for board at McDermott's, and got good, substantial fare with no frills. McDermott boarded his workmen, a hearty set of fellows, and what, with their boisterous demands upon Sally, the colored cook, for immediate service, and their running fire of criticism upon her cooking, the meal hour at McDermott's was always a very noisy and jolly affair. Sally could always answer in kind to their bantering and give them plenty of sauce in return.

On engaging board at the moderate sum of $2.50 per week my next thought was as to the means to pay it. The total of my funds that morning was $1.62½. I had been engaged by Dr. Alonzo Garcelon, afterward the famous democratic governor of Maine, to write letters for his paper, the Lewiston (Me.) Journal, and also by Mathews & Norris, the publishers of the Yankee Blade, a popular humorous paper of that day. Subsequently I wrote some letters for the New York Spirit of the Times and for the Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post. These were all popular publications then, but the Yankee Blade and the Spirit of the Times are dead, but the Saturday Evening Post, the oldest paper in Philadelphia, has been started on a new career of prosperity in the hands of enterprising men and has now a circulation many times what it had in its most prosperous days in the olden times.

These were all weekly papers, and as my pay averaged only about a dollar a column the income was not large. But as was said in explanation of George Washington's remarkable feat of throwing a silver dollar across the Potomac river where it was a mile wide, a dollar went further in those days than now.

Old-Time Correspondents.

The corps of correspondents was small then—less than a dozen in all. The Senate chamber was the center of interest, and the reporters who congregated there were comfortably accommodated in the single row of seats, or rather stools, in a narrow gallery over the chairs now occupied by the Supreme Court.

The correspondents, though small in numbers, were rather a notable lot. Foremost among them were Francis J. Grund, the "Observer" of the Philadelphia Ledger, and "X" of the Baltimore Sun, and Eliab Kingman, "Ion," of the Sun. The Ledger and the Sun have always had from that day to the present, very able Washington correspondents. They were small-sized, four-page penny papers, and had to economize every inch of space and boil down matter to its essence. Their Washington letters were limited to a third or half a column each, but they were meaty and attracted more attention and had more weight than the more wordy letters of other writers.

Grund was the Blowitz of his day—a man of varied accomplishments, a pungent writer, a fine linguist, a brilliant conversationalist, he was able to make himself welcome in all the social, political and diplomatic circles. Stout, oily, smiling, vivacious, he was a great contrast to his colleague, Eliab Kingman, who was tall and spare, with shaggy eyebrows and of Indian-like gravity and reticence. Kingman lived out 14th street, in what was then the country, in a cottage buried in a perfect jungle of trees and bushes. It is now the residence of Mr. C. C. Willard.

"Sausage Sawyer."

William E. Robinson, "Richelieu" of the New York Tribune, a tall, raw-boned, sandy-haired figure, was the hero just then of a droll contest for the privileges of the press against the privileges of the House. Robinson, in a letter to the Tribune, had made a pen picture of the lunch habits of Hon. William Sawyer of Ohio, as follows:

"Every day at 2 o'clock he feeds. About that hour he is seen leaving his seat, and taking his position in the window back of the speaker's chair to the left, he unfolds a greasy paper, in which is contained a chunk of bread and sausage or some other unctuous substance. Then he disposes of them rapidly—wipes his hands with the greasy paper for a napkin and throws it out of the window. What little grease is left on his hands he wipes on his almost-bald head for pomatum; his mouth sometimes his coat sleeves and pantaloons being used for a napkin. He uses a jackknife for a toothpick."

On the appearance of this letter Mr. Brinkerhoff of Ohio moved to exclude the reporters and letter writers from the privileges of the seats and desks on the floor of the House. The resolution was adopted by a vote of 119 to 46.

John Quincy Adams then left his seat, and, taking the arm of Mr. Robinson, escorted him to the ladies' gallery, over the Speaker's chair, where strangers were admitted on the introduction of a member of the House. And thereafter Mr. Adams, or some other member, would, on Mr. Robinson's appearance, take him by the arm and accompany him to the gallery, greatly to the disgust of Mr. Sawyer and his friends, but very much to the amusement of the spectators.

In later years Robinson was elected a member of the House from which he was expelled. His adversary went by the name of "Sausage Sawyer" for the rest of his life.

Some of the Hustlers.

One of the hustlers of the press gang was Dr. Wallis—the "Doctor" of the New York Herald, who furnished congressional proceedings, political chit-chat and social gossip for that paper. He always wrote on the jump and up to the last moment to catch the mail.

James Gordon Bennett, who wrote Washington letters for the New York Courier and Enquirer in 1827-8, claimed to have inaugurated a new system of newspaper correspondence.

He says, using the editorial "we" of the time:

"We were the first to give the business of letter writing its present light and amusing character. Before that period a Washington letter writer simply gave the dull details of both houses, the abstracts of reports or a few sketches of the speakers."

His correspondents for the Herald evidently were instructed to write in the same vein.

Another hard-working reporter was Erastus Brooks, writing for the New York Express, owned by his brother, James Brooks, and in which he afterward had a partnership. He was short-sighted and wrote with his head close to his paper, never pausing in his work and turning out an immense amount of copy.

The correspondents of that day, whose names were familiar as household words, are now dead and almost forgotten. I believe that I am the only person living who wrote Washington letters as long ago as 1848.

The Press Gallery in 1860.

The correspondents increased in numbers year by year, but did not get an official status in the Congressional Directory until 1860, when the following list, with an assignment of seats, appeared in the directory for the first session of the Thirty-sixth Congress:

S. P. Hanscom, New York Herald.
D. W. Bartlett, Springfield Republican.
N. Davidson, New York Courier and Enquirer.
A. J. Marsh, National Intelligencer.
James O. Clephane, Washington Evening Star.
Ben: Perley Poore, Boston Journal.
G. W. Adams, Washington States and Union.
L. A. Gobright, Associated Press.
C. G. Halpine, New York Times.
J. J. Coombs, Washington Republic.
W. F. Carne, Alexandria Gazette.
James E. Harvey, Philadelphia North American.
Stephen Hayes, New York Herald.
F. W. Walker, Washington Evening Express.
John Savage, Philadelphia Press.
M. M. Noah, Alta California.
E. A. Pollard, Charleston Mercury.
J. L. Elliott, New York Observer.
A. D. Banks, Cincinnati Enquirer.
Moses Bates, Boston Post.
W. Robertson, New York Day Book.
L. J. O'Connor, Charleston Courier.
A. H. Markland, Louisville Courier.
L. A. Whitely, Baltimore Clipper.
L. K. Pangborn, Boston Atlas.
A. B. Johnson, Boston Traveler.
W. M. Watson, Petersburg Intelligencer.
Jos. Medill, Chicago Press and Tribune.
T. T. Kinney, Newark Advertiser.
A. S. Mitchell, St. Louis News.
M. Stearns, New Bedford Standard.
H. D. Cooke, Ohio State Journal.
J. M. Rosse, Detroit Tribune.
L. A. Aiken, L. J. Times.
F. W. McFarland, Alexandria Sentinel.
W. L. Wilson, Indiana Journal.
W. W. Shore, Rhode Island Evening Press.
H. J. Ahord, Michigan State Journal.
E. Kingman, New York Journal of Commerce.
M. W. Cluskey, Memphis Appeal.
A. R. Potts, Fort Smith Times.
S. H. Lamborn, Ohio Patriot.
Theodore Fenn, Pennsylvania Telegraph.
J. A. Milligan, Southern Argus.
W. B. Shaw, New York Herald.
J. W. Dowling, Georgia Intelligencer.
W. A. Parkhurst, Washington Constitution.
T. S. Seybold, Washington Evening Star.
G. M. Bailey, National Era.
J. T. Piggott, Associated Press.
Ed. G. Gill, New York Herald.
Mr. Moore, Petersburg Intelligencer.
J. L. Crosby, New York Tribune.
J. F. Milligan, Norfolk Argus.
W. A. Rind, National Intelligencer.
E. T. Bridges, Chicago Evening Journal.
George Wood, Boston Transcript.
W. Robertson, New York Daily News.
Pangborn and Mussey, Cincinnati Gazette.
W. H. Joyner, Raleigh Press.
R. Sutton, D. F. Murphy, J. J. Murphy, W. H. Pope and E. V. Murphy were assigned seats as reporters of the Globe, which then published the congressional proceedings.

Men of Mark Graduated From the Press Gallery.

It is curious to note how many in this list afterward became editors or proprietors of newspapers. Among these were S. P. Hanscom, George W. Adams, James E. Harvey, John Savage, E. A. Pollard, A. D. Banks, L. A. Whitely, L. K. Pangborn, Jos. Medill, Henry D. Cooke, Ben: Perley Poore and G. M. Bailey. Henry D. Cooke was in turn editor, financier and the first governor of the District of Columbia.

James O. Clephane helped actively to develop the Mergenthaler printing machine and is now a millionaire or more.

And all the way through, the Capitol press gallery has been a training school for the production of able editors, statesmen, financiers, railroad magnates, generals, governors, poets, novelists, magazinists and men of mark in all lines.

And in "the altogether" of ability and respectability the corps of Washington correspondents was never on a higher grade than now. In the hot competition of modern journalism newspaper owners find it requisite to employ first-class men for correspondents here. And they must be men of tact, address and character, who can gain the confidence of administrations, congressmen, diplomats and officialdom generally.

In the past a good deal of friction has existed between Congress and the reporters. Members were rising continually to a question of privilege to denounce some correspondent as a liar or prevaricator, and sometimes the irate representative would be worked up to the point of shaking his fist at the reporters' gallery and characterizing it as a vipers' nest.

The Senate in those days used to spend a good deal of time in trying to devise means